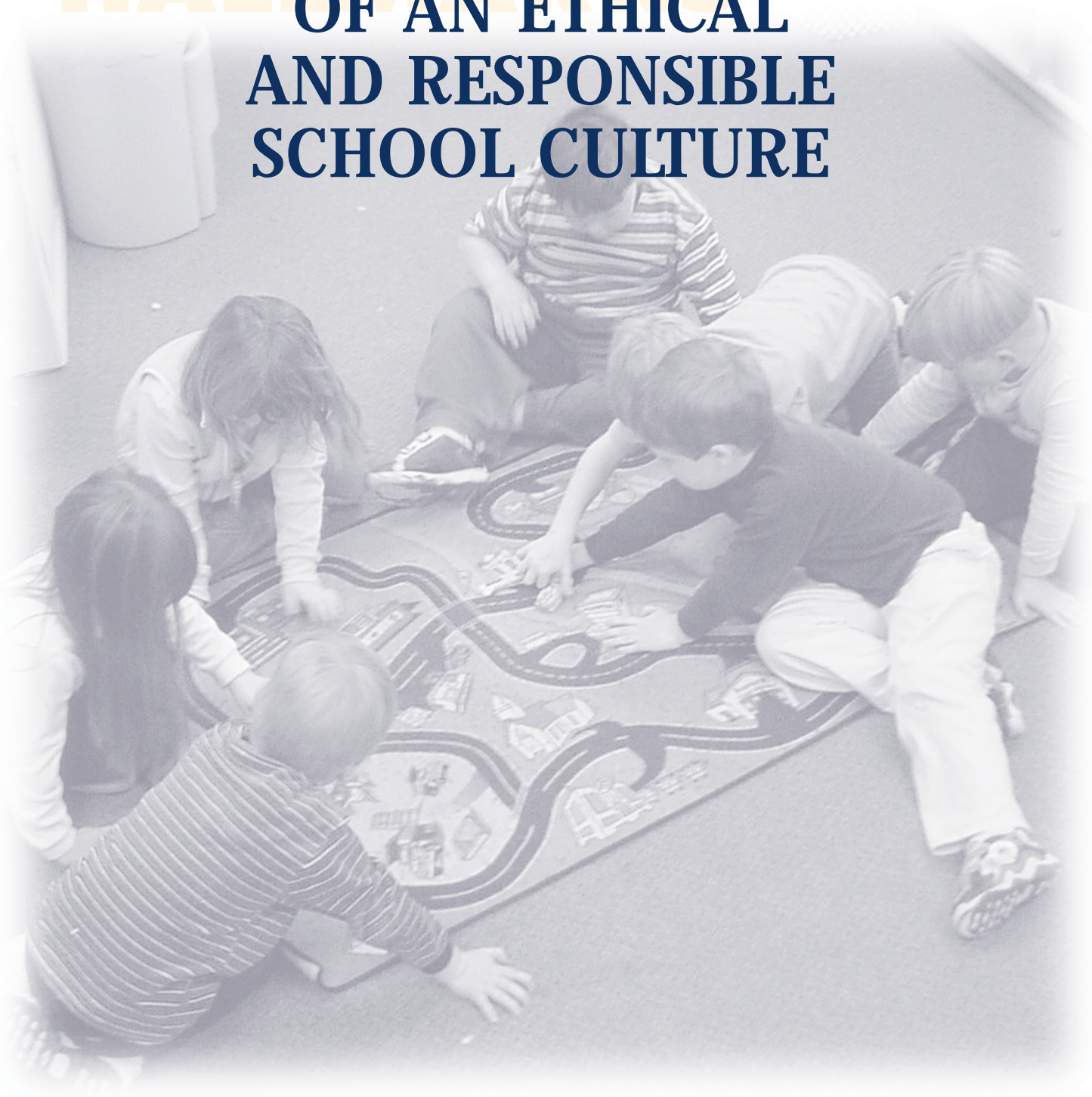**CHAPTER TWO**

HALLMARKS OF AN ETHICAL AND RESPONSIBLE SCHOOL CULTURE

FOUNDATIONS FOR BUILDING AN ETHICAL AND RESPONSIBLE SCHOOL CULTURE

"All through school you've seen kids falling through the cracks that never got the attention they needed … ."

A High School Student

In order for the Hallmarks, standards and community-identified core values in this report to impact the lives of individual students and community members, schools must have a strong foundation in place, predicated on the following:

• Institutional structures, including school and class sizes, that promote caring student-teacher relationships;

• Community involvement in the school environment;

• A school structure that respects democratic principles and fosters a sense of belonging;

• A focus on the individual strengths of students in planning and facilitating personalized learning; and

• Recognition of the critical role of values in learning and teaching, including the provision of time and resources for professional development.

"As individuals… can model… [s]o too can a school, by its collective signals and its tangible priorities, 'model' what is worthy and what is not,"

-Sizer and Sizer (1999:4)

Hallmarks of an Ethical and Responsible School Culture

The following Hallmarks are essential to the creation of a caring environment in which ethical and responsible behavior can take root and flourish. Ethical and responsible student behavior is the desired outcome. We have labeled as Hallmarks the characteristics of school culture— the structures, expectations and actions—that will lead to this outcome. They should guide the development of each local school district's code of conduct, and the actions necessary to support and enforce the codes. It is also important for communities to recognize that no single Hallmark stands alone. These Hallmarks are meant to function together and are all essential characteristics of an ethical and responsible school culture. Each Hallmark is further described in the pages that follow.

Core Values

A. Collectively identified core values are the cornerstone of all school and community efforts to create and sustain an ethical and responsible school culture.

Community Process and Participation

B. The entire community is welcomed and meaningfully involved in the process of value identification, standard setting and the enforcement of standards.

C. Students are welcomed and involved in the process of value identification, standard setting and the enforcement of standards.

Adult Roles and Responsibilities

D. There is an active and genuine partnership between schools and parents.

E. All adults who interact with students, in and out of school, strive to model and reinforce ethical and responsible behavior.

F. Teachers are authorized and expected to teach, model and enforce ethical and responsible behavior.

Integration and Inclusion

G. Efforts to promote ethical and responsible behavior are an integrated part of the school's curriculum and culture, and are not viewed as "extra."

H. Ethical and responsible student behavior is actively promoted and recognized.

I. Teaching and learning ethical and responsible behavior begins in early childhood.

J. Students apply and demonstrate principles of ethical and responsible behavior in the classroom and beyond the classroom.

Disciplinary Process

K. The disciplinary process is interventionist, inclusive, impartial, consistent, and educational.

Outcomes and Assessment

L. Outcomes are well-defined and assessed regularly.

HALLMARKS OF AN ETHICAL AND RESPONSIBLE SCHOOL CULTURE

A. *Collectively identified core values are the cornerstone of all school and community efforts to create and sustain an ethical and responsible school culture.*

Before a community or school can design policies or practices aimed at creating an ethical and responsible school culture, it must determine the values that will be the basis for those policies and practices. Actions taken to foster ethical and responsible behavior must fall within a framework of community core values.

To set and enforce standards for student behavior, students, teachers, parents and community members must share a common language and understanding of core community values. Community members must also ask themselves, "What indicators will tell us whether or not our values are being implemented?" "How will we define respect?" Such questions must be answered for each value.

> "...community participation...is absolutely critical in identifying the core values. Participation should reflect the diversity in the community."
>
> -Huffman (1994:17)

CORE VALUES FOR MAINE

Respect

Honesty

Compassion

Fairness

Responsibility

Courage

– Taking Responsibility, Chapter Four

SAMPLE STRATEGIES

• **Provide opportunities for community members to contribute to the working definitions and behavior indicators for core values.**

• **Publicize definitions and indicators for values throughout the community.**

• **Base the school mission statement and code of ethics on community identified core values.**

HALLMARKS

B. *The entire community is welcomed and meaningfully involved in the process of value identification, standard setting and the enforcement of standards.*

Schools or communities engaging in a process of value identification and standard setting must ensure that those involved in the process are representative of the diversity in the community. All community members must be welcome in the deliberative process regardless of age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, marital status, religion, or socio-economic class.

Community leaders must go beyond simply extending a general invitation to participate, instead actively reaching out to all community members to ensure that no segment of the population is denied a voice. The standards of ethical and responsible behavior that are promoted in the community's schools must reflect the community's core values, developed through an interplay of views and voices.

> "Sharing control over schools involves not just listening to diverse needs but demonstrating that they were heard. To involve parents and citizens in the work of schools is to make them partners in decision-making. To truly listen to students is to be influenced by what they say and take steps to ensure that they see the relevance of reform efforts."
>
> -Annenberg Institute (50)

The initial outreach and collaboration are only the beginning. Collaboration must be ongoing. When communities revisit and reaffirm or modify their standards on a regular basis, the likelihood of maintaining community ownership of the standards, and of achieving and sustaining desired outcomes, increases greatly.

SAMPLE STRATEGIES

- **Invite all to participate, generate and comment on a values list.**

- **Bring in speakers to address the importance of ethical values and the need for shared community values.**

- **Link students with community members through mentoring and service learning initiatives.**

HALLMARKS

C. *Students are welcomed and involved in the process of value identification, standard setting and the enforcement of standards.*

> *"Ethics are really important to me because they help me make good decisions. It's really important for me to respect people and get that same kind of respect back."*
>
> A High School Sophomore

Each of us has a strong tendency to live up or down to the expectations which others hold for us. Students are no exception. Educators and other adults must treat students as trustworthy and responsible—and give them the opportunities and support to live up to this expectation. The Commission sought to give students such a role in gathering data and outlining and editing components of this report.

Allowing students meaningful roles in the decisions about the operation of schools is a significant step in providing opportunities for responsibility. In matters of discipline, expenditures, maintaining school property, even in the realm of curricular and extra-curricular issues, students have valuable insights and are fully capable of seriously addressing these issues when they are presented in age-appropriate ways.

Students must have a sense of ownership of standards for ethical and responsible behavior. Students are empowered to develop such a sense of ownership when adults take them seriously—when they are fully involved, and when all adults, in turn, avoid inconsistency and hypocrisy by holding high expectations for all students.

Standards for ethical and responsible behavior cannot be viewed by students as arbitrary regulations imposed upon them by adults, if they are to be internalized and consistently practiced by students. This can happen only if involvement is meaningful and not merely symbolic. Adults must demonstrate respect for students to the same degree that they demand respect from students.

Students also should be taught and involved in the methods they can use to set or shift expectations with their own peers. For example, students can understand how they or other students may be subtly harassing or excluding another and how the quiet majority can reach out to a victim of bullying by making a friend, or bringing adults into a situation when intervention is needed. Students must be actors and not just bystanders in setting or changing the school culture.

SAMPLE STRATEGIES

- **Give every student access to a positive role model—at least one adult who knows and understands him or her.**

- **Empower students with opportunities to practice decision–making skills and demonstrate ethical and responsible behavior in real, meaningful situations.**

- **Involve students by providing opportunities to model and enforce standards of ethical and responsible student behavior.**

HALLMARKS

D. *There is an active and genuine partnership between schools and parents.*

Parental involvement and guidance are crucial factors in accomplishing our goal of graduating well-educated students who are good people. Achieving this goal requires the input and support of all parents. Not only are parents a child's first teachers, but studies show that parents, even during the adolescent years, have the potential to wield substantial influence over their children's behavior and choice of friends. (Chen 2000: 361).

Parents and schools share a duty to instill in students a sense of what it means to be an ethical and responsible person. Parents have a duty to remain informed about and interested in their children's school experience; schools have a duty to reach out to all parents. Through collaboration and partnership, parents and educators will come to a clearer understanding of the critical role that values play in shaping a student's intellectual and emotional development. Moreover, this partnership will ensure a more consistent message is delivered to students, not only in disciplinary situations but also in reinforcing posi-

> *"School, as an institution, may help reinforce ethics. Your friends may help mold ethics. But home is the most important place for ethics to be taught."*
> A High School Senior
>
> *"Parents need to interact with their children more. Help them with their homework and personal issues. Do things with them on a one-on-one basis… ."*
> A 53 Year-Old Woman

tive behaviors. By interacting regularly and respectfully with one another, parents and educators will be practicing one of the most effective methods of teaching ethical and responsible behavior: they will be modeling such behavior.

> "Families and schools need to interlock in a cooperative way that encourages the child's learning and maturing as a social being. Children must not experience family and school as worlds apart... "
> -Henderson et al. (1986:17)

SAMPLE STRATEGIES

- **Provide parents a forum for participation in the values definition process.**

- **Work with parents to supplement and support the values-related work students and teachers are undertaking in school.**

- **Maintain active, ongoing communication with individual students and their parents.**

HALLMARKS

E. *All adults who interact with students, in and out of school, strive to model and reinforce ethical and responsible behavior.*

"Adults should not be hypocritical. We also need to be able to trust them."
> A High School Senior

"All adults influence kids."
> A Group Interview with 4 Teenagers

"I mean, how many children really know an ethical person?"
> 40–Year–Old High School English Teacher

Students interact with adults, other than teachers, on a daily basis and the duty to teach, model and enforce ethical and responsible behavior extends to all adults in the school and community. Standards of ethical and responsible behavior must be demonstrated in the classroom, the faculty lounges, the hallways, the playground, the locker rooms, the cafeterias, on the sports fields and the school buses as well as in the streets and the public spaces of the community, by students and adults alike. Coaches must demonstrate sportsmanship while teaching athletic skills; parents must demonstrate respect in disagreements they may have with teachers and administrators.

Students must be shown that the demands of an ethical culture do not fall on them alone, but that all members of the community have an obligation to act ethically and responsibly toward each other, regardless of roles. Adults must be trained, expected, and supported to intervene promptly and consistently to stop language and behavior that is exclusionary, demeaning, harassing or bullying. And students must come to view such intervention as consistent, inevitable, and protective if they are to invoke and respect it.

> In Maine, 37% of surveyed third graders report that when they told an adult they were being bullied the bullying either got worse or stayed the same.
>
> -Maine Project Against Bullying

SAMPLE STRATEGIES

- **Encourage and facilitate mentoring by exemplary adults.**

- **Utilize ethical standards in setting professional expectations and responsibilities for all school personnel to participate in the creation of an ethical school culture.**

- **Train adults in the proven strategies for preventing and intervening in cases of harassing or hateful language and/or behavior.**

HALLMARKS

F. *Teachers are authorized and expected to teach, model and enforce ethical and responsible behavior.*

Students report that 71% of the teachers or other adults in the classroom ignored bullying incidents.
– Maine Project Against Bullying

To successfully participate in the establishment of an ethical and responsible school culture, teachers must understand and commit to the community-identified values, and be empowered, authorized, and supported by the community. In addition, teachers must be equipped with the training and tools necessary for effective teaching and interventions in the context of the community's core values.

Because the values to be reinforced in the school are grounded in the shared values of the broad community, the teacher is empowered in a way that he or she would not be if the task at hand were to instruct students in the teacher's own values. As part of this empowerment, school leaders and teachers must make professional choices about the classroom strategies and activities that will express and reinforce the shared values. The choice of these strategies and activities, like the identification of the values, will require deliberation, inclusion, communication, and respectful compromise. This process is key to the realization of values within the school environment.

Teachers must be equipped and supported to enable students to recognize and act on positive values which we should all strive to demonstrate. Honoring these values demands that teachers intervene promptly and consistently to end harassment, teasing, bullying, exclusionary behavior, foul language, and violence whenever they occur. Finally, some issues of student behavior go beyond values or attitudes, and are rooted in the medical, developmental, or psychological needs of the student. Teachers and other school personnel must be equipped with resources, and provided with appropriate options, to assess and address the needs of such students.

> *"Teachers and other community members must serve as educators, mentors and mediators."*
> A Teacher and Mother of 3
>
> *"Educate both teachers and students that respect goes both ways and should be earned equally."*
> A 34 Year-Old Woman
>
> *"I think it is the teacher's role, to not necessarily instill their own values…, but to encourage students to have their own values…"*
> A High School Junior

SAMPLE STRATEGIES

- **Provide the time and resources for professional development for all teachers to support efforts to teach, model and enforce ethical and responsible behavior.**

- **Support teachers in applying ethical practices in their classrooms and throughout the school.**

- **Provide strong administrative leadership and seek widespread community support.**

HALLMARKS

G. *Efforts to promote ethical and responsible behavior are an integrated part of the school's curriculum and culture and are not viewed as "extra."*

> "Having determined the values the community can support, the next task is to develop ways of nurturing those values through the school's culture and its instructional programs."
>
> -Huffman (1994: 7)

A curriculum that holistically supports the examination of real life issues will assist students in understanding the integral role ethics plays in their day-to-day lives. "Ethics" is not a separate course, or a club for interested people, or community service during school vacation, and cannot be treated that way in the establishment of the school's curriculum. The examination of real–life ethical issues, within the required curriculum, ensures that students will be taught both the reality, and the real impact of, ethical and unethical behaviors. Each core discipline—social studies, science and technology, English language arts, and others—includes opportunities to grapple with the ethical dimensions of political and economic choices, scientific discoveries, or literary integrity. Ethics becomes a facet of each area of inquiry. This promotes opportunities for students to act on their understanding of what it means to be a truly ethical and responsible individual.

Ethics must also be fully integrated into all facets of school life. This includes classrooms, faculty lounges, sport fields/arenas, hallways, playgrounds, locker rooms, cafeterias, and school buses—and ultimately, the home, the mall, and the world beyond. Ethical and responsible behavior must be a priority not only of teachers, but also of all school personnel and the community at large.

SAMPLE STRATEGIES

- **Integrate an ethical dimension into each content area.**

- **Provide the time and resources for professional development for all school personnel—not just teachers—to support efforts to teach, model and enforce ethical and responsible behavior.**

- **Develop individualized learning plans that incorporate an ethical dimension for all students.**

H. *Ethical and responsible student behavior is actively promoted and recognized.*

In order to sustain ethical and responsible behavior, students must view such behavior as meaningful, necessary, and rewarding. An incident-based approach to student behavior currently predominates in many schools. Such an approach can lead to treatment of behavior issues in a fragmented fashion. There also tends to be a significant amount of attention and effort devoted to negative incidents—and very little at all to positive incidents. Schools need to create systems of positive recognition that complement their negative recognition for inappropriate behavior.

Embedded in the structure of most school systems is an ideology of competition that operates in academic, athletic and social settings. A greater focus on ethical and responsible behavior may lead to an examination of the issue of competition itself, and the ways in which competition for the sake of only winning admiration or material reward may contribute to a school culture that is lacking in the realm of ethics and responsibility. In the course of their education, students who excel academically, athletically or socially are provided with formal and informal recognition and rewards for their competitively–achieved successes. Competition, however, is healthy only when it is conducted within the parameters of the community's identified core values and when it is not promoted at the expense of cooperation. A community's core values should promote cooperation alongside healthy competition in the academic, athletic, and social facets of a school's culture. Those who demonstrate excellent character must be recognized for their achievement just as are those who are academically, athletically or socially skilled.

Beyond the extrinsic recognition and material rewards from others, students need also to develop an understanding that ethical and responsible behavior has its own intrinsic and long-term rewards. Students must recognize that the application of ethical principles will help them face real situations in which their values may conflict with one another. The teaching and practice of ethical issue-spotting and decision-making skills, and the recognition of the value of making wise decisions, will help build the confidence and optimism required to sustain the core values in a broader context.

Staff members of Sidney's Bean School go beyond enforcing consequences for unacceptable behavior. They balance the responsibility of maintaining physical and emotional safety with positive reinforcement through their **Caught Ya Practice.** Whenever and wherever an adult or a peer sees a child demonstrating helpfulness, politeness, or kindness they acknowledge that child by including his or her name in a monthly drawing in which the winner receives a small prize.

SAMPLE STRATEGIES

- **Develop recognition systems for positive behavior, with input from students, that provide feedback to many students on a daily, consistent basis without embarassing the recipient.**

- **Create learning environments that support and reward cooperative learning and teaching.**

- **Communicate and collaborate regularly with parents and community to draw positive attention to ethical behavior and reinforce school–based recognition efforts beyond the school walls.**

HALLMARKS

I. *Teaching and learning ethical and responsible behavior begins in early childhood.*

Discussions of student behavior and ethical issues often focus on the prohibited behaviors of middle and high school students such as substance abuse, foul language, violence, and defiance of family and school rules. Many pro-grams—from Civil Rights Teams to service learn-ing—have been primarily targeted at these behavior patterns manifested by adolescents.

To foster a society of ethically sound adoles-cent and adult citizens, the habits of and com-mitment to ethical and responsible behavior must be modeled and taught during the pre-school and primary school years. Scientific research consistently reveals that the first three years of a child's life are a critical time for physi-cal, cognitive, and emotional development. It is during these early years that a child learns, through the modeling and instruction of the adults and older children around them, how to relate to the larger community. Young children, in their own terms, can recognize ethical dilem-mas and articulate the importance of personal and communal responsibility.

Communities and schools must actively work with parents, preschools, and early childhood programs to ensure that adults working with young children understand the importance of an early grounding in ethics and appropriate behav-ior. Information must be shared on the differ-ence between "kids being kids" and situations where active intervention is necessary.

> *"If your friend gets teased you stick up for them."*
> A Fifth Grade Student
>
> *"[When you are responsible, you] don't blame other people for what you did."*
> First Grade Student
>
> *"[Respect is shown by] being a good sport and saying 'good game' even if you lose."*
> First Grade Student

> *"I believe that these stories straight out of elementary school are just as important to our Commission as the straightforward answers are… I found it very interesting that I could ask questions about ethics and other compli-cated issues to an eight-year old and learn such valuable lessons."*
> A Student Interviewer

SAMPLE STRATEGIES

- **Work with young children to recognize and name ethical issues within the appropriate context.**

- **Utilize older children as age–appropriate mentors to young children.**

- **Seize opportunities—including the parenting education curriculum for current students—to empower current and future parents to address attitudinal and behavior issues.**

HALLMARKS

J. *Ethical and responsible behavior is exhibited in the classroom and beyond the classroom.*

A broad and ingrained sense of ethics will arm students to avoid, or recognize and resolve, ethical challenges. Educators must ensure that students develop a deep understanding of ethics that spans all three dimensions of ethics and responsibility.

The first dimension is knowing (cognition); skills are needed to recognize ethical issues and analyze situations for their ethical significance. The second dimension is feeling (emotion); empathy is a capacity that must be developed and nurtured. And the third dimension is acting (behavior); this dimension often requires not only cognitive and emotional intelligence, but also real courage in the face of moral dilemmas or peer pressure. Schools are in a unique position to assist students in acting courageously in the face of peer pressure.

If students are to grow into ethical and responsible individuals, they must learn from an early age that there are shared values that must be upheld to ensure the existence and development of our society. Decision-making skills are of little utility in the absence of ethical awareness and moral courage. Students must develop the skill to recognize ethical situations and to identify the right course of action; and they must find the courage to act upon these values. They will, if teachers and other adults are good models.

"You have to live them [values] in order to enforce them."
A Business Owner and Father of 1

"It is not what I am, but who I am!"
High School Student and OutRight Member

"Being ethical is not an event—it is who you are."
A High School Sophomore

Beyond the classroom, subtle exclusion or denigration of students in other groups or cliques can have a powerful detrimental effect on a school's climate. Working across such exclusionary groupings needs to be taught and not assumed: students report that they readily self-segregate by perceived status, interest, or ability. Schools should provide academic and extra-curricular activities that foster and support the community-identified values through opportunities for students and adults to interact across contexts, roles and stereotypes.

"Bullying most often occurs at school where there is minimal or no supervision (e.g. playground, hallways, cafeteria)."

-Maine Project Against Bullying

SAMPLE STRATEGIES

- **Provide service learning opportunities.**

- **Train students in and support peer tutoring and conflict resolution programs.**

- **Foster and commit to democratic school structures and practices.**

HALLMARKS

K. *The disciplinary process is interventionist, inclusive, impartial, consistent, and educational.*

> *"A code could be effective if enforced in a way the students would know it is more than words on a page. There can be no exceptions, total equality."*
>
> A High School Senior

Discipline should be implemented in a way that includes opportunities for students to learn and opportunities for adults to teach. When a student is to be disciplined, the occasion should be viewed by all involved as a moment to teach and restore, rather than a moment of reckoning. After intervention, the focus must turn to education and restoration.

Schools must start with a thoughtful, consistently applied system of interventions and consequences for inappropriate behavior. In any disciplinary process, it is important to assess the situation, taking note of such factors as the age of the students, the nature of the offense, and whether an incident is an isolated one or one of a series of disciplinary problems.

"Zero tolerance" policies and attitudes have become prevalent across the nation in response to some violent and catastrophic incidents in a handful of schools. Safety is paramount. However, the implementation of "zero-tolerance" policies has often been aimed at individuals and not at behavior. Punishments based on zero tolerance policies that focus on removal of the offender, and not on correcting harm or educating the offender, are incomplete at best and counterproductive at worst. Such policies fail to resolve either the underlying behavior problem or its impact on the victim and the community. Schools should instead take a positive/preventive approach to student discipline, one that begins with intervening immediately to stop the offending behavior, but moves beyond that to educational and restorative steps.

Restorative discipline focuses on the effects of unacceptable behavior rather than on the rules that have been broken. All those involved in an incident of unethical or irresponsible behavior—whether perpetrator or victim—have a stake in its resolution. This approach starts with accountability by the offender and then moves to develop a resolution to problematic behaviors that focuses on redress to the victim and/or the school community. Students are to be held accountable for their actions, but the end result of the process may vary from situation to situation within a general framework for applying restorative discipline. (Toews 2000: 8). Restorative discipline techniques require flexibility and a commitment to the idea that each situation and each student is unique.

> According to the Maine Bullying Project,"... without intervention, bullies identified by age eight are six times more likely to be convicted of a crime by the age of twenty-four and five times more likely to end up with serious criminal records by the age of thirty."

SAMPLE STRATEGIES

- **Couch discipline in terms of values, not rules (i.e., "you were disrespectful to this student" vs. "you're not allowed to tease people").**

- **Involve students in the development of the disciplinary code, and ask them to sign an agreement to abide by the code.**

- **Implement anti-bullying practices across all grade levels.**

HALLMARKS

L. *Outcomes are well-defined and assessed regularly.*

Policies and practices focused on issues of student behavior are like other education policies or practices—they must be subject to evaluation and any necessary revision. Evaluation of practices and policies in the realm of student behavior is critical for improving programs, curriculum, practices or school structure. Data that may be useful in the measurement of change in student behavior include: attitudinal and incident data, youth at-risk data, school health data, data from evaluation of service learning programs, and assessments embedded in the curriculum.

To be effective, assessment must extend beyond student behavior and skills to address the progress of the school as an institution, and the behavior and skills of school staff.

Evaluation is not separate from other efforts to create and sustain an ethical school culture. Rather, it is an integral part of a comprehensive strategy for achieving this goal. Evaluation techniques will be customized to suit the approaches of individual schools or districts, but in each case, baseline data will provide a critical starting point for identifying outcomes, determining the strategies for achieving them, and measuring success in reaching those outcomes.

> "Evaluation of character education should assess the character of the school, the school staff's functioning as character educators, and the extent to which students manifest good character,"
>
> -Lickona et al. (1991)

SAMPLE STRATEGIES

- **Use multiple sources of data and begin assessment when the school year or program begins and assess continuously.**

- **Use the school or district mission statement as a basis for designing the assessment intruments.**

- **Evaluate student attitudes, but also assess cognitive understanding of core values, behavioral indicators, decision-making, and their implications.**